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## **CLIMATE: Obama team likely to spotlight embattled federal studies (Friday, January 30, 2009)**

**Robin Bravender, E&E reporter**

Among the swath of climate issues the Obama administration must confront quickly is a major climate science report that critics say was bungled by the Bush White House.

The Bush administration was accused of trying to minimize federal climate assessments required by law by opting to release a series of narrow reports instead of a high-profile, sweeping document. The Bush White House waited until the administration's final days to release the last of the studies ([Greenwire](#), Jan. 29).

But President Barack Obama vowed in his inauguration address to "restore science to its rightful place," leading to predictions that major federal scientific climate assessments will play a greater role in shaping national policies in his administration than they did under President George W. Bush.

"I think we've already seen that President Obama is talking to Congress and the American public about our planet being at risk from global warming, and I think he'll continue to do that," said Dan Lashof, science director of the Natural Resources Defense Council's Climate Center. "So certainly, science and the results of these assessments will be given a lot more prominence under Obama than was the case in the Bush administration."

The Global Change Research Act of 1990 requires the government to prepare a major report every four years on climate research and effects.

The Clinton administration released the first report, which offered dire predictions about the possible consequences of global warming, in 2000. But rather than write another broad assessment in 2004, the Bush administration opted to release 21 staggered, narrowly defined reports.

Environmentalists sued the administration over the reports in 2006, saying they failed to comply with the law requiring a sweeping assessment that might help shape climate change policy. A federal judge sided with the environmentalists and ordered the production of a new climate assessment.

The Bush administration issued a draft of the court-ordered report last May, but critics say that assessment still did not go far enough to provide a user-friendly report that allows lawmakers to make informed decisions.

"It just did what they had to do to technically meet the requirements of the court order -- nothing more," said Rick Piltz, director of the watchdog group Climate

Science Watch and a former official at the U.S. Climate Change Science Program, the government agency responsible for coordinating the federal reports.

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) criticized the Bush administration's assessments and backed the environmentalists' lawsuit alleging the suppression of a full scientific analysis.

"While we've appreciated the climate reports, they simply do not substitute for a full analysis as required by the law," a Kerry spokeswoman said in an e-mail yesterday.

Kerry and Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) introduced a 2007 bill that would require a more extensive climate-science review every four years and would restructure the government's climate science and research program. Kerry expects to reintroduce that legislation in the 111th Congress, spokeswoman Whitney Smith said.

## **Obama 'positioned to run' with science agenda**

With a new team in the White House, observers see a new opportunity to emphasize climate science.

The climate program recently issued a second draft assessment, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced a 45-day public comment period for the document in the Jan. 13 *Federal Register*. Publication of the final document and its release will be handled by the Obama team.

"I think that the opportunity that exists with that report is to summarize the current state of knowledge and to highlight areas where the administration and Congress are going to get together and make rapid headway on the effects of preparing for climate change," said Richard Moss, vice president and managing director for climate change at the World Wildlife Fund.

Even Bush's critics credit the draft report -- which was released days before the administration left office -- with being a major improvement over the previous document.

"My sense is that it is a much-improved version," Piltz said.

But while the Bush administration was accused of minimizing press attention to the assessments and trying to suppress information in order to avoid U.S. engagement on global warming, scientists and environmentalists hope the Obama team will widely publicize the second draft report and other forthcoming climate assessments and give them prominent roles in decision-making.

"The Obama administration is well positioned to run with the climate science agenda now and start to get new products out that will provide the information we need as a society to prepare for the effects of climate change," Moss said. He added that Jane Lubchenco, Obama's pick to lead NOAA, and John Holdren, who will serve as the president's science adviser, would be "superb leaders of that effort."

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